



A Greenway Plan for New York City, 1993

Overview:

The Greenway Plan, published in 1993, presents the city's vision for the nation's most ambitious urban greenway system -- 350 miles of landscaped bicycle and pedestrian paths crisscrossing New York City. It signaled the start of a multi-year effort to create new public recreational opportunities, increase the mobility of cyclists, walkers, and joggers, and enrich the lives of all New Yorkers.

Priority routes have been identified and funding has been secured to advance some of them. The Department of City Planning, the New York City Department of Transportation and the Department of Parks and Recreation have comprehensive programs to refine the preliminary plan, examine the feasibility of some of its components, create master plans to guide development, and implement portions of the greenway system.




Introduction

This report presents the city's vision for the nation's most ambitious urban greenway system -- 350 miles of landscaped bicycle and pedestrian paths crisscrossing New York City. It signals the start of a multi-year effort to create new public recreational opportunities, increase the mobility of cyclists, walkers, and joggers, and enrich the lives of all New Yorkers.

New York City may seem the least likely large American city for a comprehensive system of transportation and recreation paths, 80 percent of which would be traffic-free routes separated from roadways. Yet, the physical rights-of-way for much of this system exist, virtually all are in public ownership, and many routes are developed and in use. Over the past 18 months, a preliminary planning framework for an integrated greenway system has been developed, thanks to the cooperative efforts of city, state and federal agencies, borough presidents' offices, and open space, pedestrian

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and bicycle constituency groups. Priority routes have been identified and funding has been secured to advance some of them. Now, the Department of City Planning and the New York City Department of Transportation are about to launch a comprehensive program to refine the preliminary plan, examine the feasibility of some of its components, and begin its implementation.

The plan builds on New York's substantial legacy of greenways, which were part of every era of open space development in the city. Frederick Law Olmsted, architect of Central and Prospect parks, was the first to design a "park way" for scenic carriage drives and bicycles in the late 19th century pre-automotive era. Olmsted planned Eastern and Ocean parkways as boulevards linking the great new urban green space of Brooklyn's Prospect Park with its surrounding communities and the beaches and regional open spaces beyond.

In the 1930s, Robert Moses vastly expanded the park system, particularly along the waterfront where miles of pedestrian paths and esplanades were built in new parks, notably Riverside Park and East River Park. Moses also built bicycle paths along many roadways, such as Shore Parkway, to satisfy the "groups, organizations and individuals...clamoring and petitioning for bicycle tracks...exclusive lanes...and use of roadways during hours when automobile traffic is very light, all for the accommodation of this revived sport." An alternative transportation option was an extra dividend during the war years when gasoline was rationed.

In the 1980s, the Neighborhood Open Space Coalition saw an opportunity to develop a 40-mile Brooklyn-Queens Greenway for walkers and cyclists. Their detailed plan would connect Brooklyn's Coney Island with Fort Totten in Queens, using Ocean and Eastern parkways and a series of 12 parks along the way.

Most recently, the city's Comprehensive Waterfront Plan proposes to expand public use and enjoyment of the waterfront with a series of interconnected pathways in all five boroughs. The plan capitalizes on the city's vast system of public parkland that covers more than 40 percent of its shoreline; it also recommends zoning changes that would mandate publicly accessible waterfront paths and upland connections in most new residential and commercial developments on the waterfront.¹

In New York City today, the time is once again ripe for a new surge of greenway development to form an integrated system reaching into all corners of the city. Greenways answer the growing public demand for safe and pleasant ways to travel about the city -- to get to work or school, to shop or do errands, or to reach the waterfront, parks, beaches and museums. New federal transportation policy and funding programs recognize their role in helping to alleviate traffic congestion and air pollution and, at the same time, accommodate burgeoning recreational interests. A first-class system of greenway trails can bring a new dimension to life outdoors in New York City.

Notice: The Greenway Plan was the forerunner of all federally funded bicycle and other non-motorized-related initiatives in New York City. The plan was published in 1993 (NYC DCP 93-27). The Net-version that you see here varies slightly from the published version, in that it omits photographs of various greenways and individual borough maps with existing and proposed greenways. Also missing is a map entitled "Schematic Greenway Plan: Priority Routes" from Fall 1993. Instead we have included the updated "Greenway Map" (1996), depicting funded projects in all five boroughs. The map distinguishes between existing greenways, proposed greenways and points out their funding source and status. (CMAQ stands for Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program, ENH for Enhancement, and EQBA for Environmental Quality Bond Act. You can zoom into the map by ways of using Acrobat Reader). The original report can be obtained in the DCP bookstore.

¹The Waterfront Zoning Text Amendment was approved by the City Planning Commission in August 1993 and presently awaits City Council review